Netwatch

BY JIM CARROLL

YOUR GUIDE TO BUSINESS & ACCOUNTING ON THE INTERNET

Advice for a flat world

A few years back, I posted an entry to my weblog titled, "What do you do after the world gets flat? Put a ripple in it!" My post came in response to the buzz surrounding the bestselling book *The World is Flat* by Thomas Friedman. Executives everywhere were scrambling to understand the impact of a massive global economy; the impact of offshoring and outsourcing; and how business models would be forever changed with increased global competition.

To me, the answer was obvious — innovative organizations should avoid the product commoditization that comes with the flat world. CEOs have two choices: move forward into a world where you are competing on price, or innovate, change and adapt so you are playing in a different, higher-value market.

Of course, not only products have to innovate in a flat world, so do professional skills. There's no doubt we will continue to see a number of organizations outsource their financial, legal and other backroom functions. Just witness the growth in business process outsourcing or recruitment process outsourcing. Accountants, human resource professionals, legal experts — almost anyone with a professional skill is impacted, unless he or she moves into a higher-tier marketplace.

Given this reality, it might be a good time to assess your career, skills and future options and determine if you want to continue going forward in a commodity market or if you want to up the value of your brand. The obvious answer is to take the latter route. We're seeing this trend within the profession to a massive degree today: those who develop unique knowledge niches and concentrate on the delivery of very specialized services find themselves in great demand, while those with commodity skills are likely worried about the potential impact of a recession upon their career prospects.

If you focus on career specialization, the flat world is not a threat but an opportunity. It's become a cliché, but in the much-hyped knowledge economy, those who have special capabilities often truly do have a global marketplace. Today, it is easier than ever to market your skills to that worldwide audience.

With that perspective in mind, I have three pieces of advice. First, it pays to have a blog. I've been posting to mine for more than six years and discovered that by regularly placing relevant, useful observations online, my position in Google for various topics and phrases has consistently increased. I seem to be in a sellers' market: I just turned down a request to go to Shanghai to speak on the topic of global trends after a global CFO found my flat-world article online.

Second, invest in online search engine advertising. I'm a big fan of Google AdWords, despite the fact that the media seems to have soured on Google lately. Third, relentlessly track how people are finding your unique skills. I regularly use Google Analytics to examine how other people manage to find me online. By drilling down and seeing what people are searching for, I can adapt and change my areas of focus and expertise.

> Outsourcing will impact people with professional skills, unless they move into a higher-tier market

The same experience could hold true for anyone with unique professional skills. If your focus has been the design and implementation of sophisticated ERP systems, why not reach out to a global audience? If you have mastered certain forensic investigation skills, realize that your market isn't restricted to a small, local geographic world. In the flat world, the opportunities are wide open.

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a well-known speaker, author and columnist. Reach him at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com or log on to his website at www.jimcarroll.com

ACCESS THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

Google AdWords	**adwords.google.com**
Google Analytics	**analytics.google.com**